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SIPDIS

FOR NEA/ARP AMACDONALD

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SUBJECT: PREPARING FOR FM QIRBI'S VISIT TO WASHINGTON

REF: SECSTATE 122731

Classified By: Ambassador Stephen Seche for reasons 1.4(b) and (d).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY. On December 8, the Ambassador called on Foreign Minister Abu Bakr al-Qirbi at Qirbi's request to discuss the Ambassador's most recent consultations in Washington. Qirbi had been appraised of the invitation to visit Washington in January 2010 for meetings with Secretary Clinton and other senior officials, and agreed with the proposed timing. He also agreed that the weeks preceding the visit would offer a useful opportunity for senior ROYG officials to meet with Embassy officials in a round-table forum to establish the framework for dialogue and advance the Yemen-U.S. relationship. Qirbi and the Ambassador discussed the USG's new strategy in Afghanistan, with the Foreign Minister noting that it is the responsibility of the international community to ensure that al-Qa'ida elements in the AF/PAK region do not relocate to Yemen. END SUMMARY.

Enhancing Economic Development

¶2. (C) Qirbi agreed that the ongoing conflict in Sa'ada between Yemeni military forces and Huthi rebels prevented the international community from pursuing on a large scale its desire to advance development in Yemen. Pleased to hear that the U.S. Government supports a "Friends of Yemen" group) which he described as similar to the Pakistan model) the Foreign Minister noted that this proposal was initially presented by the UAE. Going further, Qirbi added that such a vehicle would present a different approach to addressing Yemen's economic problems. Both the Foreign Minister and the Ambassador agreed that while some progress towards economic development was being made, greater and quicker progress was needed. Towards this end, Qirbi agreed that a 'round-table' discussion between ROYG officials and the Embassy in preparation for Qirbi's trip to Washington will establish a framework for strategic dialogue between ROYG and USG beyond security and counterterrorism cooperation.

Ensuring Yemen Does not Become the Next FATA

¶3. (C) Noting the U.S. Government's concern that pressure on al-Qa'ida in Pakistan and Afghanistan may encourage these elements to relocate to Yemen, Qirbi noted that they could not "simply land" in Yemen without first having to traverse various regions and borders. Accordingly, Qirbi asserted that it is the responsibility of all parties -- particularly Pakistan, Afghanistan, the U.S., and Saudi Arabia -- to ensure that al-Qa'ida elements in the Pakistan-Afghanistan border area do not relocate to Yemen. In his assessment,

there has been significant talk on enhancing security and intelligence cooperation among the relevant parties, but little action. Qirbi acknowledged significant cooperation and support by the USG for border security, to include cooperation with the Yemeni Coast Guard to ensure maritime border security.

Comment

14. (C) The Foreign Minister's agreement to travel to Washington to meet with senior USG officials, to include Secretary Clinton, affords an opportunity to reinforce our bilateral relationship with ROYG in areas outside of security and counterterrorism. While the ROYG's continuing focus on the Huthi conflict will continue to be a distraction, political engagement at senior levels of our government can provide opportunities to re-focus the ROYG's attention on the need to attend to other priorities. The "dialogue" Qirbi endorses between ROYG and Embassy officials can serve as a useful beginning to this process. END COMMENT.
SECHE